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Testimony of the Texas School Alliance on the Telecommunications Infrastructure Discount

Senate Business and Commerce Committee

August 14, 2012

Room E1.016

The Texas School Alliance (TSA) comprises 37 of the largest school districts in the state, representing 38 percent of the state's total student enrollment, 43 percent of Texas' economically disadvantaged students, and 59 percent of the state's Limited English Proficient students. On behalf TSA, we strongly support the continuation of the telecommunications discount.

The legislature in 1995 took special care to ensure that a telecommunications infrastructure that connects public entities such as schools, libraries, institutions of higher education, non-profit telemedicine centers, and public hospitals was established at a **reasonable rate**. Given the significant budget pressures districts currently face and the increasing reliance on technology as an integrated component of the educational process, the discount represents a cost savings measure. Prior to the 82nd legislative session, TSA districts affected by the provision indicated that the T1 discount saves them upwards of a combined **\$1.5 million per year**. Continuation of the discount will help districts deliver high-quality educational content at an affordable price. In 2006, the PUC submitted a report to the Legislature pursuant to SB 5, evaluating three alternative funding sources for these discounts. The report concluded that eligible "institutions have come to rely heavily on this discount program to fulfill their mission. The expiration of this program in 2012 could have a significant adverse impact on Texas's schools, libraries, and nonprofit health-care institutions." Thank you for your leadership on this issue.